

FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY PM'S
MAY 19, 1976

Office of the Vice President
(Yorktown, Virginia)

TEXT OF REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AT
BICENTENNIAL CEREMONY
YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA

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Mr. President, Madame Giscard d'Estaing, distinguished guests: Mr. President, your presence in the United States is the high point of our Bicentennial celebration. Had it not been for France, there might never have been a United States. The personal presence here today of the President of the French Republic, here at Yorktown where French and American arms won America her freedom, is an event that stirs our emotions, summons our patriotic pride and strengthens even further the friendship between our two peoples.

Nowhere are France and the United States more closely joined than here at the scene of those great events that made possible the very existence of this Nation.

Let us turn back the clock of history for a moment to recall those epic days. In the summer of 1780, the American Army was poorly armed, underpaid and dispirited. The American cause was in serious jeopardy. But, that same year, our infant democracy had won its first great friend, the nation of France.

The Marquis de Lafayette and Admiral d'Estaing supported the American cause with the French government. The result was a major expeditionary force to America of 5,500 men under the command of General Rochambeau. General Rochambeau, a brilliant, seasoned military leader, became General Washington's invaluable Comrade-in-Arms and adviser. The arrival of Rochambeau's well armed, well disciplined French troops gave new heart to the ragged American forces.

In the Fall of 1781, the combined French and American forces made the decisive thrust of the Revolution -- here at Yorktown. They landed nearby on the James River.

In the meantime, French naval forces under Admiral de Grasse blocked the British ships from Chesapeake Bay. The result was American and French arms won a swift victory at Yorktown. Cornwallis surrendered. And America achieved her freedom.

After the battle, a touching incident took place which speaks volumes about the relationship between the infant Republic and France, her first ally. Cornwallis came up and indicated to a French officer that he would rather surrender to General Rochambeau than to the American rebels. The French officer replied, "You are mistaken, the Commander-in-Chief of our army is on the right." And he pointed to George Washington.

Mr. President, the American people will always be grateful to your country. Our friendship today is firmly based in 200 years of shared beliefs and principles -- our common dedication to freedom and respect for human dignity.

With this shared history, with these shared values, we can face the future together, with pride in our heritage, with confidence in our capacities, and with faith in our common purpose.

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